

Topographies of Memory: The 1960s Student Movement in Germany and the US. Representations in Contemporary German Literature

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Abstract:

This chapter explores the representation of the 1960s student movement in contemporary German literature. The theoretical frame for my analysis is informed by the discourse on remembering and forgetting, storytelling and silence. While my research is part of a larger project, in this essay I am focusing on the representation of the United States and the American-German relationship within the literary representations of 1968.

Keywords: German Literature | Student Movement | 1960s | United States | Literary Analysis

Article:

Introduction

This chapter explores the representation of the 1960s student movement in contemporary German literature. The theoretical frame for my analysis is informed by the discourse on remembering and forgetting, storytelling and silence. While my research is part of a larger project,¹ in this essay I am focusing on the representation of the United States and the American-German relationship within the literary representations of 1968.²

Told from the point of view of first-person narrators who participated in the events of 1968, the novels I am reading—*Frühstück mit Max* by Ulrike Kolb (2000), *Der Vorleser* by Bernhard Schlink (1995), and *Eduards Heimkehr* by Peter Schneider (1999)—construct the US as a geographical location as well as an imaginary space, allowing critical reflection on the 1960s student movement and on the transatlantic relationship.³ I propose to read these literary texts as a

contribution to the discourse on processes of cultural transfer and as an invitation to reflect on the construction of identities within a historical perspective.

1968 and Literature

The year 1968 as a historical, political, cultural, and social event enjoys a complex relationship with German literature. Many contemporary German authors played key roles during the German student movement. At the same time, 1968 marks the proclaimed death of literature. Hans Magnus Enzensberger, editor of the literary journal *Kursbuch*—one of the key publications of the 1960s student movement—published the widely read polemic “Gemeinplätze, die Neueste Literatur betreffend,” boldly asserting the death of literature due to its inability to fulfill a political function in the struggles of the 1960s.⁴ Sparking a heated public debate, Enzensberger's claim did not put an end to the publication of literature. In fact, in the same volume of the *Kursbuch* with the famous verdict, numerous literary texts and poems were published. The emerging debate over the function of literature led to a renewed interest in the possible topics that literary texts might address and in aesthetic questions. Thus, literary productivity and publication continued even after the proclaimed death of literature, and from this conflict emerged the later representations of the events of 1968 in German literature. In the immediate aftermath, texts such as *Heifer Sommer* (Uwe Timm, 1974), *Kerbels Flucht* (Uwe Timm, 1980), and *Lenz* (Peter Schneider, 1973) dealt with the '68ers' disillusionment about the failure of the movement to implement immediate fundamental change.

Since 1989, a continuously growing number of literary publications have dealt with the German student movement in the 1960s.⁵ This renewed interest in 1968 expressed in literary texts coincided with the new political reality after the fall of the Berlin Wall and German unification, which initiated a debate over how to anchor the student movement within the history of a unified Germany. Current literary representations differ markedly from the novels published in the immediate aftermath of the student movement. Since they tell the story of the movement and its participants retrospectively, these current novels include reflective and self-reflective layers of recollections that shift meanings and challenge former approaches and attitudes.

Representation of the US in 1968 Memory Novels

I argue that remembering 1968, in the three novels by Kolb, Schlink, and Schneider, serves as the lens through which the American-German relations in the twentieth century are remembered and reevaluated. In fact, the texts seem to suggest that it is impossible to remember 1968 without also remembering the US and its importance for Germany in the twentieth century. The novels achieve this by structuring the remembered history as a history of three generations: the generation of parents who experienced and participated in the Third Reich, the '68ers who are narrating the stories, and their children, who constitute the third generation.

Distinguishing among three generations points not so much toward the actual birth date of the literary figures, but to “clusters of shared formative experience.”⁶ These experiences connect

and divide the generations.⁷ On the one hand, these experiences are passed on from one generation to the next. On the other hand, many protests of the younger generations take on the form of generational conflicts that create distance between the generations. From the viewpoint of the second generation, the first generation frequently passed on their experiences of the Third Reich as a form of silence. In the 1960s, the second generation protested against the way West Germany had dealt, or rather had failed to deal, with its Nazi past. The second generation spoke of the collective guilt of their parents and of the fascist environment their parents had created and raised them in, since the past had not ended yet. These second-generation West Germans considered themselves to be the victims of their parents, thus posing, in very problematic ways, as the historical victims of the Third Reich and replacing the actual victims." In their literary memories, the second-generation narrators reflect on their failure to address their own responsibility or to investigate their own family histories by focusing on some abstract collective guilt." Members of the third generation then turn away from their own parents because they disagree with their parents' attempts to fundamentally change the social structure of society during the 1960s and 1970s

These generational experiences determine the representation of the United States and the relationship between the US and Germany. The novels construct the US as the land of exile for those members of the first generation who were forced to leave Nazi Germany and who were able to escape the Holocaust. The members of the second generation remember their ambivalent attitude toward the US during the 1960s, whereas their offspring do not seem to be burdened by history and view the US as the Utopia of the globalized twenty-first century, albeit in problematic ways.

Temporalities and Topographies in the Discourse on Memory

Literary texts that are embedded in the discourse on memory create a meeting place for individual and culturally mediated memories. They connect personal experiences and historical events and shed light on the political ramifications of personal memories and the significance of historical and political events for the individual. Yet, literary texts differentiate themselves from autobiographies as well as from historiographies because they create possible worlds and thus are typically not confronted with claims or questions regarding their truth value or validity in terms of their representation and interpretation of the past. In fact, the interpretation of a literary text depends on the analysis of the specific qualities of the genre, its language use, the position of the narrator and the literary figures, and its intertextuality and historical context.

In this section I will outline and connect two theoretical considerations that form the basis for my claim that literary remembering is structured both temporally and spatially. The process of remembering constructs a three-dimensional palimpsest of layered memories that can be unearthed in the manner Walter Benjamin proposes in his short essay "Ausgraben und Erinnern," with the implications described therein." On the one hand, literary texts as one medium among others (e.g., holidays, memorials, museums, art, films, music architecture) contribute to the

continuous construction and deconstruction of cultural memory.” The model of the palimpsest thus visualizes the relations among literary texts that obtain additional meaning and significance through their reception and in literary histories. As outlined in the introduction, this is also true for the representation of 1968 in German literature. On the other hand, in certain literary genres, processes of remembering and forgetting often form the basis of the plot and structure the narrative. This is particularly true for autobiographies, autobiographical fiction, and fiction that is told from the perspective of the first-person narrator looking back at his or her life.

The Temporal Dimension of Memory

As a concept, memory refers to the past, the present, and the future. The word memory implies that the person who remembers refers to his or her own experiences in the past. Memories are shaped by the present in which they are remembered. Furthermore, memories determine which past is remembered and how the past is remembered in the future. As the analysis of the three novels shows, the narrators not only remember events that shaped their lives—mainly the student movement in the 1960s—but they also seem to “remember” the Nazi past, which they experienced only as very young children, if at all. Marianne Hirsch calls such memories, which are based not on one's own experiences but on transmission by others, whether via conversations, books, visual depictions of the past, or any other form of cultural representation, “postmemories.”¹²

I propose to apply Hirschs concept of postmemory to the analysis of the novels in order to shed light on the complex temporal dimensions they represent. Thus, the narrators tell stories based on both their own memories of the student movement and postmemories of the Nazi past. These memories and postmemories construct the temporal dimension in the novels. These layers question and critique each other and create problematic fusions and confusions. Their combination points to the constructedness of both memories and postmemories. While memories rest upon one's own experiences and construct those experiences from a present perspective, postmemories are removed one step further, since they are mediated by some form of cultural representation.

As former members of the student movement, the narrators revisit their memories of their involvement in that movement. This leads to a reassessment of their own roles within the movement and its function for Germany before and after the fall of the Berlin Wall. In particular, the narrators reevaluate their attitudes toward the Nazi past. While the students of 1968 protested against what they perceived as silence—the inability, and the unwillingness, of their parents' generation to confront their involvement in and with the Third Reich—and the continuation of fascism in West Germany even after 1945, thirty years later the narrators focus on their own shortcomings first, before condemning their parents and society as a whole.

These second-generation narrators emphasize the problematic aspects of their own engagement with the past, which was also marked by silences, in particular because of their inability and

unwillingness to engage in a dialogue with their parents. In *Fruhstick mit Max*, Nellys parents are mentioned only in passing, described as the cliché family of the 1950s, focusing on the future, the “*Wiederaufbau*” (reconstruction) and the “*Wirtschaftswunder*” (economic miracle). In *Der Vorleser*, Michael Berg seeks a conversation with his father, a professor of ethics, in order to find an answer to the question of whether he has the responsibility to reveal Hanna's illiteracy to the court. However, since the relationship between Berg and his parents is marked by emotional distance, he describes his dilemma on a very abstract level and avoids mentioning Hanna and his relationship with her; thus he receives only a very abstract answer from his father. In *Eduards Heimkehr*, Eduard Hoffmann only learns more about his grandfather, who bequeathed him an apartment complex, by talking with a Jewish survivor. His grandfather, who was excluded from the family memory, was not included in Eduard's interest in the past either, since as a member of the student movement Eduard was dealing with a general “*Vergangenheitsbewältigung*” (coming to terms with the past) and not with his own family history. Even his marriage to the daughter of Holocaust survivors does not spur a more personal engagement with Germany's past.

In addition, by posing as victims of the perceived fascist structures in West Germany, the students displace the historical victims of National Socialism, who did not find a space within the German discourse about National Socialism and the Holocaust in the 1960s. Literary texts bring to life memories as well as silences, absences, and voids that are often understood as forgetting. Revisiting their postmemories, the narrators question the sources that mediated them originally. Furthermore, they attempt to include voices that were previously forgotten, missing, absent, or silenced, in particular those of the victims of the Third Reich and their families. The narrators reassess their postmemories, which were often mediated through their own families, and complement them with the memories of the victims of the Nazis. I read this as an attempt to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the past and to give the victims a voice within the German discourse on National Socialism and the Holocaust as represented in German literature. These representations also stress the ongoing responsibility of the second and third generations for a past that will not go away.

The Spatial Dimension of Memory

The literary palimpsest of memories contains not only a temporal, but also a spatial dimension. Pierre Nora agrees with Maurice Halbwachs that individual memories are established within a social framework, from which they thus gain their meaning.¹³ At the same time, the construction of memory within a society is based on a variety of individual representations of the past, which form narratives that are negotiated, accepted, and/or refuted by the public discourse. Nora argues that in premodern times societies experienced memory as a continuous reliving of the past through rituals, the passing on of traditions from one generation to the next, and the reliance on traditions that resisted modernization. Modern society, according to Nora, separates the past from memory. Due to this loss of the “*milieux de memoire*,” modern societies are forced to create “*lieux de memoire*,” specific locations and occasions of remembering in order to enable

individuals and groups to gain access to the past. Nora concludes that this loss of the everyday experience of remembering as a lived and living tradition initiated the contemporary discourse on memory and remembering. Nora's definition of memory as a primitive or sacred form of accessing the past that is opposed to modern historical consciousness expresses a nostalgic longing for a past that has probably never existed in the proposed form. And while I do not agree with his fundamental critique of history and historiography as having destroyed the "milieux de memoire," I find his concept of "lieux de memoire" to be a useful analytical tool for analyzing the representation of space in literary texts.

In my reading, particular locations in the United States and Germany and the literary figures and point to questions of personal and national identity. Analyzing the literary representation of the United States and Germany as "lieux de memoire" emphasizes their constructedness through processes of remembering and forgetting. These memories and postmemories evoke die geographical locations, their national boundaries, and the controversial images thereof. The representation of the United States after 1989 also evokes a displaced discussion about the German nation, national history, and national identity. In addition, the novels create the United States as a meeting place for the three generations and as a site of generational conflicts. While the second generation revisits its ambivalence toward the US in the 1960s, the importance of the country for members of the first generation who emigrated to the US in the 1930s and 1940s is recognized. The third generation places its dreams and hopes on a country that promises life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. The various representations of the United States do not offer access to historical, political, or social authenticity, yet the country serves as "lieux de memoire" and thus adds layers to the palimpsest of memories and postmemories that structures these novels.

Remembering the United States: A Site of Generational Conflicts

The three generations that mark the temporal structure of these 1968 memory novels evoke very different images of the United States. Furthermore, the United States also point to the self-definitions of three generations. I propose to read the three novels in light of their much differentiated constructions of the United States as a Utopian imagination, as a land of exile and immigration, and as a country that often seems to entail political, social, and cultural extremes.

I am particularly focusing on the representation of the United States in the recollections of the second generation. The '68ers revisit their own past and their images of the US in the 1960s. During the time of the student movement, the '68ers' perception of the US as fascist often overshadowed their awareness that the US was also the country that initiated and inspired the worldwide protest movements. Revisiting this bifurcation allows the narrators to recognize the complexities of the transatlantic relation and to add a historical dimension that was often missing in the earlier debates, i.e., the important role the US played as the host to many emigrants and victims of the Nazi regime. In *Der Vorleser* and in *Edudrds Heimkehr*, both narrators visit the United States in order to meet survivors of the Holocaust who emigrated there during the 1930s

and 1940s. In addition, the third generation questions the second generation's ambivalence toward the United States. The third generation is now able to emphasize the Utopian opportunities of a country that does not burden its inhabitants with the demands of a long history and promises individual freedom and the limitless pursuit of happiness.

The US during the 1960s: Country of Extremes

All three narrators remember their contradictions and ambivalences toward the United States in the 1960s. Even though the United States was a member of the Allied forces that liberated Germany from National Socialism—something the Germans had failed to accomplish themselves—and supported the democratization of West Germany, the members of the student movement did not perceive the US as a liberating, but rather as an imperialist and colonialist force. Furthermore, some of the characters fail to acknowledge that the movements on both sides of the Atlantic shared the same goals, such as the struggle against imperialism and colonialism and the fight for equality and peace, as well as the same methods of protesting, initiated by the outrage against oppression and exploitation of the Third World and against US military involvement in Southeast Asia.¹⁴

Leggewie points to the fact that the anti-authoritarian movement in the United States determined the themes—Vietnam and racism—and gave shape to spontaneous forms of action, such as teach-ins, sit-ins, and happenings that were extensively adopted and imitated on the other side of the Atlantic.¹⁵ Gassert calls the anti-Americanism of the New Left an anti-Americanism “with America against America.”¹⁶ Thus, in their recollections, the narrators acknowledge that what looked like an outright rejection of the US in the 1960s was a much more complex process of rejection and appropriation that did not juxtapose Germany and the US but rather unified the younger generation in both countries against the governments in power.

In addition, many of the former German protesters moved to the United States. As the German government enacted laws banning radical activists from civil service employment, the so-called “*Radikalenerlass*,” many of the protesters could not find work in their home country but found opportunities in the United States, which seemed more capable of reintegrating the protesters into mainstream society. This is indicated in *Eduards Heimkehr*. Eduard works as a professor of genetics in California, emphasizing that he did not leave Berlin on his own account but rather was denied an academic career in Germany because of his political past. Thus, the United States is able to confirm its image as the country of personal freedom and opportunities for everybody, even those who previously challenged American politics.

The US as the Land of Exile and Immigration

Despite the many shared aspects of the student movements in various countries, they were still distinct in their historical, cultural, and local situatedness. In Germany, this was marked by the engagement with the Nazi past. Michael Berg, the narrator in *Der Vorleser*, reconsiders the critical engagement with the German past by the members of the 1960s student movement.

Feelings of guilt, shame, embarrassment, and complicity accompany him his whole life. Since Hanna Schmitz, his former lover and a convicted concentration camp guard who kills herself on the day she is to be released from prison, has named him as executor of her will, he travels to New York City to deliver Hanna's possession, an old tin can and some money, to the daughter of a survivor of the concentration camp where Hanna was a guard.

Even though Berg recounts the visit to New York only briefly, the visit receives a prominent place at the end of the novel and gains significance because it is the only overseas travel described by the narrator. During the meeting the atmosphere is cold, and Berg and the woman remain rather distant, a feeling emphasized by the fact that the woman's name is not mentioned. The street where she lives consists of modest and orderly apartment buildings, leaving a rather clinical impression that is mirrored in the description of the woman as matter-of-fact. Her neighborhood does not evoke the Manhattan that is often described in German novels that concentrate on its energy, fast pace, and diversity.¹⁷

The conversation focuses on Berg's relationship with Hanna. Prompted by the woman, Berg describes his relationship with Hanna. This is the first time he is able to admit his relationship with her. Neither during the time of the relationship with Hanna, nor during the trial, nor long after the trial, when he meets a former fellow-student at the funeral of the professor who taught the seminar accompanying the trial, was Berg able to tell either his parents or any of the other students about Hanna. Thus, it is surprising that Berg readily tells a stranger about Hanna. The survivor's daughter attempts to interpret Berg's experiences in light of her own experiences as a victim of National Socialism. She insinuates that Berg suffered throughout his life because of Hanna. Even though Berg rejects this interpretation, the fact that he decides to tell his story to someone who is connected to Hanna through historical events remains puzzling. While his confession could be seen as yet another attempt by a '68er to align himself with a historical victim of the Holocaust, it also points to the importance of the United States as a place where the individual is not burdened by German history, by the many attempts to come to terms with it, or by a specific perspective of and approach to history that is determined by being German. Instead, Berg is free to tell his life story. Furthermore, Berg seems to trust the survivor to understand the complexity of the emotions he is struggling with.

Even though this is an important step in working through his own life and a sign of dissolving identity constructions previously fixed by essentialist notions of national identity, it is still problematic that this is the main topic of conversation between a German and one of the victims of National Socialism, in particular since this is their first encounter. It seems symptomatic of the contemporary German approach to the past that the German perspective—often expressed as German suffering, which seems to relativize the suffering of those who were persecuted by the Nazis—is emphasized. At the end of the visit, the woman refuses to accept the money because she does not want to exchange money for redemption. However, she does accept the tin can, which replaces the one she lost in the camp.

This visit in New York is Berg's first encounter with a Jewish survivor. This is surprising, since the generation of the student movement emphasized the need to come to terms with the past. However, this generation's approach did not include a dialogue with those who suffered most during the Third Reich.¹⁸ Instead of talking with survivors of the Holocaust, Berg visits a concentration camp twice during the time of Hanna's trial. On one of his trips to a camp, he angrily engages in an argument with a male member of his parents' generation. The conversation ends rapidly, signaling the breakdown in communication between the first and the second generation.

Berg is disappointed that visiting the concentration camp neither gives him access to the past nor allows him to engage in a dialogue with the past. Historical locations do not contain significance because they were the locations of historical events; rather, they gain significance because meaning is attributed to them by remembering. Since the Holocaust had not been publicly discussed in Germany for a long time, the historical locations are associated with few postmemories that Berg could refer to in order to access the past. For Berg, the sites of the Holocaust are neither "lieux" nor "milieux de memoire."

In *Eduards Heimkehr*, a similar encounter between a survivor of the Holocaust and the narrator takes place, and the representation of the US and the transatlantic relationship play an even more prominent role. Peter Schneider tells the story of Eduard Hoffmann, a professor of genetics at a university in California who is married to the daughter of Holocaust survivors. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, Hoffmann accepts a position at a research institute in the former East Berlin. Even though Eduard is originally from Berlin, his return to the city is not a homecoming but a confrontation with a city that has changed as fundamentally as the political situation changed after German unification. Furthermore, Eduard is constantly tempted to compare the German and American ways of life.

Eduard inherits an apartment building in the former East Berlin that is occupied by squatters. To prevent Eduard from claiming his property, the squatters accuse his deceased grandfather of having acquired the house from the previous Jewish owners during the 1940s, thus profiting from the Nazi laws expropriating Jewish property. Eduard, who had not anticipated any of these difficulties when he accepted the inheritance, is not familiar with his family history and is determined to uncover the truth. He first consults the archives, which do not provide sufficient information. In an attempt to stress the importance of eyewitnesses, he discovers that the former owners' daughter lives in Florida.

Like the encounter described in *Der Vorleser*, his visit to Florida is characterized by an ironic distancing on the part of the Jewish woman called Edita Marwitz. She comments on the Germans' need to receive a pardon from Jewish survivors at a time when it is convenient and necessary for the Germans. She assures Eduard that his grandfather did not profit unduly from the political situation but in fact helped her father by buying the house at a fair price at a time when Jewish property was already being confiscated by the Nazis without compensation for the

Jewish owners. She also adds her personal story to the mere legal facts and emphasizes that Eduard's grandfather did not help solely out of humanitarian reasons, but because secretly he was in love with her.

The encounters described in the two novels are similar not only in that they both take place in the US, but in that they also both involve a male narrator and an older Jewish woman. The women are the eyewitnesses who are asked to grant redemption and to lend their recollections in order to gain access to the historical events. Both women initiate a switch in the language that is spoken during the encounters. They greet their visitors in English and tell their stories in German—their mother tongue, as Edita Marwitz emphasizes.¹⁹ I propose to read these literary representations of the meetings between the survivors and members of the second generation as an ironic inversion and a gendered critique of constructions of history and historiography traditionally dominated by male voices. As the narrators fail in their attempts to rely on “objective” representations of history, such as historical locations and documents, they need to seek out the female voices, which until that point have been forgotten. This adds female memories—remembering the public and the personal and their connections—to the historiography of the Holocaust, and emphasizes the necessity of storytelling in order to create a more complete and complex image of the past.²⁰

These first attempts at a Jewish-German dialogue are problematic because they are seemingly self-serving. Without the obligation to pass on an inheritance in Berg's case or the need for information in Hoffmann's case, the Germans of the second generation would still not have sought the direct contact with the victims of the Third Reich. Both narrators comment on this failure and interpret it as a continuation of the problematic silence, neglect, and avoidance strategies inherited from the parents' generation, against all opposite assurances by the second generation to address the aftermath of the Third Reich in a different way than the previous generation.

Yet even though these encounters are problematic and characterize the Germans as naive at best or vicious at worst, they nevertheless give Jewish survivors a voice in contemporary German literature. The members of the second generation, who thought to differentiate and distance themselves from their parents' involvement in the past, reevaluate their behavior in the 1960s and change their approach via reflections and actions. The actual encounters take place in the United States, thus acknowledging the difficulty of the German-Jewish dialogue in Germany in the 1990s and the important role the US played in offering exile to refugees in the 1930s and 1940s. For this discourse, the US serves as the “*lieux de memoire*,” because only the distance from Germany and the visits in the homes of the survivors and refugees in the United States allow members of the second generation of Germans to remember their own life and to reassess their own approaches to the past.

The US as a Utopian Construct

Whereas in *Der Vorleser* and *Eduards Heimkehr* the United States serves as the meeting ground for the second generation and the survivors of Nazi Germany, the novel *Frühstück mit Max* tells the story of the encounter of Nelly and Max, members of the second and third generation respectively, in a coffee house in Manhattan. The chance meeting triggers the exchange of their memories. Nelly, who is visiting New York as a tourist, was Max's father's girlfriend and participated in raising Max, who now lives in Brooklyn and works in Manhattan as an architect. They remember the years they lived together in a communal living project in Berlin called “Mommsen” (named after the street where they lived, and invoking the renowned historian) and tell each other their life stories. Intertwined with and juxtaposed to the dialogue between the two characters are their individual memories. These reveal that Nelly and Max's experiences during the 1960s and their evaluations of those years differ greatly. Whereas Nelly remembers the dreams that inspired the generation of the '68ers and the attempts to realize them in the communal living project, Max emphasizes the chaos and neglect he experienced as a young boy, which he blames on the lack of a stable family structure. Even though Nelly's dreams have been shattered—she has separated from Max's father and battled alcoholism and depression—she still remembers the 1960s with fondness. Max, however, moved to the United States to distance himself from his father, the 1960s, and the historical burden Germany as a home imposes on its inhabitants.

In a book review of *Frühstück mit Max*, Reinhard Baumgart comments on the important function of New York City as the location of the novel.²¹ He claims that the city enables the creation of balance between the past and the present and between the contradictory emotions triggered by the encounter between Max and Nelly and their memories. Baumgart stresses that placing the encounter in the US rather than in Berlin creates a distance and thus avoids any kind of nostalgic longing for the past. In addition, I would like to emphasize the importance of New York City as the seemingly appropriate background for Max's lifestyle.

Max's first visit to the city left such a strong impression that he decided retrospectively, he refers to feeling high and being turned on by its atmosphere, using language that is usually employed to describe the effects of drug use. This attempt to free himself, and to live in a city that promises not only personal freedom but also liberation from the burden of having grown up in Germany, is at least linguistically overshadowed by implications of dependency and addiction. For Max, the burden of the past is not primarily the burden of national history, in particular National Socialism and the Holocaust, but of having grown up in a communal living project in Berlin during the late 1960s and 1970s. He detests the chaos he experienced there and is unable to forgive his father or to show any understanding for his father's attempt to raise his son in an anti-authoritarian manner.

The burden of family obligations and make a fresh start. In Nora's terms, immigration to the US leads to a loss of everyday experiences of remembering as a living tradition. However, in my reading of Max, this does not entail a Utopian imagination of radical difference, since he limits himself to preserving or rather recreating a lifestyle that was already outdated in the 1960s. As

his form of rebellion against his upbringing, he chooses to become an architect in an attempt to create order and impose structure, and he lives a neatly organized and regulated life within a nuclear family. Furthermore, Max does not settle in Manhattan, but in Brooklyn. Thus, he rarely experiences the rush of emotions that led to his migration to Manhattan; only if he has some domestic disagreement with his wife does he feel liberated on the Brooklyn Bridge on his way to work.

Nelly comments critically on Max's attempt to lead a self-determined life. When he describes his current life to her, in particular his obsession with his work, which actually leaves him very little time for anything else, including his family, she thinks that he is what they—the generation of 1968—used to call a “*Fachidiot* (narrow-minded nerd), exposing him as a conformist adhering to the expectations of Western capitalist society. His rebellion gains significance as a rebellion only in light of his personal experience within his family's history. This rebellion will impact changes on the political level only in so far as such changes equalize historical and cultural difference, since his life lacks any engagement with specific historical events. This is indicated by the name of the coffee house—Space Untitled—where Nelly and Max meet. The design and atmosphere of the coffee house attract all generations despite their differences, foreshadowing the loss of any historical or cultural specificity due to processes of globalization. In that sense, Manhattan as a city full of contradictions, whose name means “heavenly earth,” does indeed provide the space to reconcile difference, if only on the surface.²²

Conclusion

Reassessing 1968 today means acknowledging that any attempt to deal with the Holocaust and National Socialism will turn out to be insufficient and only partially successful. As visualized in the image of the palimpsest, this is inherent in the problem, since this past will not go away and thus the only appropriate response to it is a constant process of remembering. Consequently, neither the parents' generation nor the '68ers learn how to explain and come to terms with the past; rather, each generation must find its own strategies, which will be contradicted, disputed, argued about, silenced, and expanded upon by the next generation.

At the same time, the contemporary literary representation of the 1960s student movement necessitates reconsideration of the impact and the significance of the movement. Some of the participants, as represented by the literary figures, paid a very high price for their political activism, ranging from death and injury to the exclusion from certain professions imposed by the German government, and to exploitation and self-exploitation by the various Marxist groups that formed in the 1970s.²³ Others were quite successful in their “*Marsch durch die Institutionen*” their march through the institutions, and achieved positions of considerable political, economic, and cultural influence. At the same time, all members of the 1960s student movement are confronted with the blame for current social problems. Rather than acknowledging the positive effects of a general liberation for a variety of formerly repressed groups, contemporary conservatives bemoan the loss of tradition expressed in essentialist notions of “Germanness,”

since the 1960s student movement ultimately supported the further democratization, Americanization, and globalization of West Germany.

The novels *Fruhstiick mil Max*, *Der Vorleser*, and *Eduards Heimkehr* contribute to the discourse on processes of cultural transfer and invite reflection on the construction of personal and national identities within a historical perspective. As literary texts, they emphasize the central role of storytelling within these discourses. As memory novels, they enable the study of the complex relation between the past, the present, and the future. They open poetic spaces that address remembering as well as forgetting. According to Umberto Eco, “forgetting” is impossible in language, since language always marks the absence and the void with linguistic signs that in turn make “forgetting” impossible.²⁴ Thus, different strategies of “forgetting” in literary representations can be interpreted as additional layers of recollections. This analysis entails a sense of play, since poetic spaces invite creativity and resistance to the demands imposed by everyday language use.

At the same time, some aspects of the novels I have been analyzing also entail an affirmation of the status quo. They seem to refer back to essentialist notions of identity, in particular with respect to what it means to be German, and they attempt to place contemporary literature firmly into a rather traditional German literary history. The narrator in *Der Vorleser* seems to suggest that in order to fill the vacuum left by the Third Reich one must construct a personal and national identity based on what is genuinely German and has remained unchanged over the last centuries: German language and literature. He sends Hanna sound recordings of German literature that he himself tapes. His choice consists of the traditional canon of German literature, since he claims that neither he nor Hanna needs any more experiments, and he does not include any literature outside the canon. Thus, he relies on the notion of *Kulturnation*,²⁵ the idea of shared literature, music, art, and philosophy that provides a cultural identity untainted by German history. That this in itself is a problematic notion, however, is made clear by the structure of the novel as well as its end: the narrator questions himself constantly, and every single assertion is contradicted by numerous considerations and rhetorical questions that are not answered. Furthermore, the attempt to rely on the canon of German literature cannot “save” Hanna or redeem her guilt or replace a dialogue between Berg and her—even after she is able to read and write and has listened to many tapes, she still decides to commit suicide the day before she is released from prison.²⁶

In *Eduards Heimkehr*, the third generation as represented by the squatters draws on the moments of protest and revolutionary attempts in Germany in the last three centuries and appropriates these moments for its own purposes. However, the squatters' eclecticism and only fragmentary knowledge of history leads them to misrepresent Eduards grandfather, whom they falsely accuse of having obtained the house illegally. Furthermore, their protest ends once they have the opportunity to purchase the apartment complex. The day they sign the contract is marked as their return into mainstream society: They cover the table with a white tablecloth, roll out the carpets, and offer coffee and homemade cake to Eduard. Like Max in Kolb's novel, who has already

settled into a nine-to-five lifestyle with long work hours and rare meetings with his nuclear family, their future of a middle-class lifestyle seems predestined. One couple is expecting their first child and planning their wedding. Both novels seem to indicate that just like the chain of short-lived and failed revolutions in Germany, the revolutionary attitude expressed by a generation is only an adolescent phase, which the individual outgrows. Thus, many of the literary figures who participated in protest movements reenter a society that preserves the status quo of traditional definitions of identity and that is shaped by democratic and capitalist constitutions within a globalized world.

I suggest that the literary representations of the 1960s student movement add historical depth to the engagement with contemporary social movements. If the 1960s' critique of capitalism, imperialism, and militarism and its fight for equality, democracy, and peace foreshadow the contemporary critique of globalization, then perhaps the novels suggest that the fourth generation might learn from their grandparents in order to avoid the mistake the latter identified in the aftermath of the 1960s: "Wir sind nicht radikal gewesen!"²⁷

Notes

1. I am currently working on a book manuscript, tentatively entitled *1968 and the German Literary Imagination. Literary Representations and Debates of the 1960s after 1989*.
2. I am using "1968" as the label for the events comprising the student movement, with the height of the German movement between 2 June 1967 (death of Benno Ohnesorg) and 11 April 1968 (Rudi Dutschke wounded by gunshots).
3. Ulrike Kolb, *Friihstück mit Max* (Stuttgart, 2000); Bernhard Schlink, *Der Vorleser* (Zurich, 1995), *The Reader*, trans. Carol Brown Janeway, (New York, 1997); Peter Schneider, *Eduards Heimkehr* (Berlin, 1999), *Eduard's Homecoming*, trans. John Brownjohn (New York, 2000).
4. Hans Magnus Enzensberger. "Gemeinplätze, die Neueste Literatur betreffend," *Kursbuch* 15 (1968): 187-97.
5. Among them: Sophie Dannenberg, *Das bleiche Herz der Revolution* (2004), Klaus Modick, *Der Fliigcl* (1994), Sten Nadolny, *Selim oder die Gabe der Rede* (1990), Robert Schindel, *Gebürtig* (1992), Elke Schmitter, *Leichte Verfehlungen* (2002), Peter Schneider, *Skylla* (2005), Leander Scholz, *Rosenfest* (2000), Franz Maria Sonner, *Als die Beatles Rudi Dutschke erschossen* (1996), Franz Maria Sonner, *Die Bibliothek des Anentdters* (2001), Heipe Weiss, *Fuchstanz* (1999), Ulrich Woelk, *Ruckspiel* (1993) and Ulrich Woelk, *Die letzte Vorstellung* (2002).
6. Saul Friedlander, "History, Memory and the Historian," in *Gedächtnis, Geld und Gesetz: Vom Umgang mit der Vergangenheit des Zweiten Weltkriegs*, ed. Jakob Tanner and Sigrid Weigel (Zurich, 2002), 68. See also the following contributions to the discourse on generational history

and memory: Heinz Bude, "Die Erinnerung der Generationen," *Vergangenheitsbewältigung am Ende des 20. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Helmut Kcinig, Michael Kohlstruck, and Andreas Woll (Opladen and Wiesbaden, 1998), 69-85; and Christina Schneider, Cordelia Stillke, and Bernd Leineweber, *Das Erbe der Napola: Versuch einer Generationengeschichte* (Hamburg, 1996); and Sigrid Weigel, "'Generation' as a Symbolic Form: On the Genealogical Discourse of Memory since 1945," *Germanic Review* 11, no. 4 (2002): 264-77.

7. See the insightful essay by Salomon Korn who uses the term "geteilte Erinnerung" to point to the shared and separating aspects of the memory of the Holocaust for Germans and Jews. This concept is also applicable to the different generations constituting the memory discourse: Salomon Korn, *Geteilte Erinnerung: Beiträge zur 'deutsch-jüdischen Gegenwart'* (Berlin, 1999).

8. This aspect has been well explored with respect to the "Vaterliteratur" published in the 1970s. Furthermore, many 68ers comment on this aspect in their autobiographical and biographical accounts. Cf. Renate Siebert, "Don't Forget: Fragments of a Negative Tradition," in *International Yearbook of Oral History and Life Stories: Memory and Totalitarianism*, ed. Luisa Passerini (London, 1992), 165-77, 166: "'We are all Jewish', we used to cry in student demonstrations in Germany in 1968."

9. Mark Roseman, ed., *Generations in Conflict: Youth Revolt and Generation Formation in Germany 1770-1968* (Cambridge, 1995), 45: "It was a curious fact that although the 1968 generation wanted to break through the taboos and the silences it was not prepared to acknowledge its own vulnerability or to confront fully its own relationship with the past."

10. Walter Benjamin, "Ausgraben und Erinnern," in *Gesammelte Schriften*, 1 vols., ed. Tillman Rexroth (Frankfurt, 1981), 4.1: 400-401.

11. For further discussion see Peter Reichel, *Politik mit der Erinnerung: Gedenkstättenorte im Streit um die nationalsozialistische Vergangenheit* (Munich, 1995) and James E. Young, *At Memory's Edge: After-images of the Holocaust in Contemporary Art and Architecture* (New Haven and London, 2000).

12. Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory* (Cambridge, 1997).

13. Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Memoire" *Representations* 26, no. 1 (1989): 7-24; Maurice Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory*, trans. Francis J. Ditter, Jr., and Vida Yazdi Ditter (New York, 1980).

14. See Martin Klimke's contribution to this volume.

15. Claus Leggewie, "'1968': A Transatlantic Event and Its Consequences," in *The United States and Germany in the Era of the Cold War, 1945-1990: A Handbook*, 2 vols., ed. Detlef Junker (New York, 2004), 2:421-29.

16. Philipp Gassert, "‘With America against America’: Anti-Americanism in West Germany," in Junker, *Era of the Cold War*, 2:502-509.
17. For an overview of the subject in German literature after 1945 see Sigrid Bauschinger, "Mythos Manhattan. Die Faszination einer Stadt," in *Amerika in der deutschen Literatur: Neue Welt, Nordamerika, USA*, ed. Sigrid Bauschinger, Horst Denkler and Wilfried Malsch (Stuttgart, 1975), 382-97.
18. The only notable exception is the law professor who was in exile for unknown reasons and who teaches the seminar focused on the Nazi trials that Berg enrolls in as a law student in the 1960s.
19. All four characters are not completely comfortable using English, pointing to the importance of language for the purposes of identity constructions. In particular, both Berg and Hoffmann emphasize that, for them, texts written in English and conversations in English always create a distance and do not cause the same immediate affective reactions as those in German. In *Eduards Heimkehr* the language switch is not only talked about, but integrated in the text: The first couple of sentences of the dialogue between Hoffmann and Marwitz are written in English.
20. In particular in *Der Vorleser* the difference and complementary necessity of historical research, personal memory, and storytelling is emphasized: in the 1960s, the woman whom Berg visits had published a book about the camp that the law students used in order to research the Holocaust.
21. Reinhard Baumgart, "Feme Zeit, ganz nah," *DieZeit*, 18 May 2000, 55.
22. Bauschinger, "Mythos Manhattan: Die Faszination einer Stadt," 396.
23. For the last aspect, see Gerd Koenen, *Das Rote Jahrzehnt: Unsere kleine deutsche Kulturrevolution 1967-77* (Cologne, 2001).
24. Umberto Eco, "An An Oblivionalis? Forget It!" *Publication of the Modern Language Association of America* 103 (1988): 254-61.
25. For a discussion of that concept see Stephen Brockmann, *Literature and German Reunification* (Cambridge, 1999).
26. After the extremely successful initial reception of the novel in the US, mostly due to the enthusiastic review in Oprah's book club, the more recent reception by American scholars has been more critical.
27. "We have not been radical!" See "Wir haben Fehler gemacht." Rede von Peter Schneider vor der Vollversammlung aller Fakultäten der Freien Universität Berlin, 5 May 1967, <http://www.glasnost.de/hist/apo/fehler.html>. Accessed 17 August 2009.